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ABSTRACT

Information about Georgia's Special Instructional Assistance Program (SIA) is presented. The program is designed to serve children in kindergarten through grade five who are functioning below the normal expectations for their age range, usually as a result of deficient language and cognitive development. The vast majority of SIA teaching and learning activities in school are conducted through or based on langauge concepts. The SIA program addresses all areas of curriculum and children's development, but focuses on the enhancement of each child's ability to understand and use language. The program also involves lowering the pupil/teacher ratio; providing for an activity-based, integrated curriculum; and involving parents in their children's education. Included in this document are materials authorizing the program, program implementation guidelines for the Office of Instructional Programs that focus on eligibility determination, delivery models, instruction, parent participation and training, staff development, program evaluation, application for funds, and the program planning process. Regulations concerning limits on class size and SIA and non-SIA student ratios for kindergarten, first, and second grades are appended. (RH)

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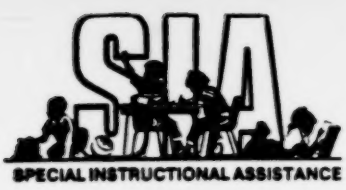

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[GEORGIA'S SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.]

Special Instructional Assistance (SIA) is designed to serve children in grades kindergarten through five who are functioning below the normal expectations for their age range. This delayed functioning is not caused by a diagnosed handicapping condition but is most often associated with deficient language development and cognitive development.

The vast majority of teaching and learning activities in school are conducted through or based in language concepts. SIA, while addressing all areas of the child's development and all areas of the curriculum, focuses on the development and enhancement of each child's ability to understand and use language. In order to develop language, children must use language; therefore, the program guidelines provide that identified children remain in a heterogenous class for their instructional activities. Smaller classes or additional teachers working in existing classes will be required. This grouping will provide: (1) good peer language models, (2) opportunities for children to use and develop their own language skills, (3) more adult-child interactions and (4) more attention to individual needs.

Most young children learn best when they can see, touch, and/or experience the ideas and concepts being taught. Early childhood certified teachers selected to work in SIA classes should be able to implement effective, cooperative learning experiences and believe in the developmental approach. The program funds allow for the purchase of equipment and materials to enrich the classroom environment and to provide an activity-based instructional program. SIA requires the use of concrete, manipulative materials for introducing and practicing skills; however, paper and pencil will be used as a method for communicating and using language, not as the vehicle for instruction.

SIA is complemented by a parent training component. SIA is required to offer to the parents of each child served a minimum of six instructional opportunities and three formal parent-teacher conferences per year. This component is vital to classroom instruction and will provide the parent with specific skills and methods for working with their child at home. Conferences will focus on the child's activities, progress, and ways the parent can be a partner with the school in the child's educational achievement and development.

Another essential component of the program is staff development. Because of the developmental approach, comprehensive staff development must be provided to the administrators and teachers who participate in the program. The purpose of this staff development is to articulate, explain, demonstrate, and facilitate the developmentally appropriate practices that are inherent in the program.

Special Instructional Assistance is founded on sound principles of early childhood education programs supported by research. This practice includes lowering the pupil/teacher ratio, providing for an activity-based, integrated curriculum, and involving parents in their children's education. The State of Georgia must practice and fund the best documented ways of ensuring success for each student and excellence in each school.

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SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANCE

Code: IDDH

(Adopted: June 8, 1989 Effective: June 8, 1989)

Special Instructional Assistance (SIA) is designed to serve children in grades kindergarten through five who have identified developmental delays that may prevent them from maintaining a level of performance consistent with expectations for their respective ages. This delayed functioning is most often associated with deficient language development and cognitive development; it is not caused by a diagnosed handicapping condition.

The state superintendent of schools shall provide for the operation of a special instructional assistance program for students. Funds appropriated for this program shall address the needs of the youngest eligible students in each local school system before addressing the needs of older students.

Local system programs shall include the following.

1. Eligibility criteria. Initial eligibility is established by using two or more of the following screening methods:

   a. Parent questionnaires or interviews
   b. Teacher's observations
   c. Results of additional standardized evaluation
   d. Language evaluation

   Students identified as eligible will be placed in SIA if they perform below the scaled score (at or near the 35th percentile or its equivalent) on the State Board of Education-adopted instrument.

2. An appropriate delivery model.

3. An instructional component that provides developmentally appropriate learning experiences that enable children to reach age-appropriate expectations in the areas of language, cognitive, affective and motor development and to build self-esteem.

4. A parent component specifically designed to help parents become participants in their child's development and education.

5. A staff development component designed to help staff understand and address the needs of the SIA student.

6. An evaluation of the instructional, parent and staff development components.

The state superintendent of schools is authorized to grant funds to local school systems with approved applications in an amount not to exceed 50 percent of the direct instructional costs per full-time equivalent (FTE) count, plus the training and experience factor for teachers. The grant shall include a specified amount for parent training. During the initial year of implementation, the grant shall also include a specified amount for training special instructional assistance personnel.

O.C.G.A.§20-2-153.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANCE GUIDELINES

The Office of Instructional Programs shall administer the following procedures to ensure effective implementation of the Special Instructional Assistance (SIA).

I. Eligibility Determination

A. Kindergarten

Initial eligibility is established by using two or more of the following screening methods:

-parent interviews or questionnaires
-teacher's observations
-results of additional standardized tests
-language evaluation

Documented evidence of indicated need for SIA must be maintained in the student's permanent record.

Program placement is decided after potentially-eligible students are identified as performing below the scaled score (at or near the 35th percentile or its equivalent) on a screening instrument approved for this purpose by the State Board of Education.

B. Grade One

1. Initial eligibility is established for any first grade student scoring below the scaled score (at or near the 35th percentile or its equivalent) on the testing component of the state-board adopted first grade readiness assessment process,

2. Any student is eligible who was in SIA the previous school year, with the recommendation of the previous teacher and supporting documentation,

3. Program placement is decided after potentially-eligible students are identified. Criteria for selection for placement shall be included in the system application. These criteria shall include supporting documented evidence from one or more of the following:
   -parent questionaires or interviews
   -teacher's observations
   -results of additional standardized evaluation
   -language evaluation

C. Grades Two-Five

1. Initial eligibility is established for any student scoring below the scaled score (at or near the 35th percentile or its equivalent) on BOTH mathematics and reading on the nationally normed or state tests mandated for grades 1-4, or

2. any student scoring below the scaled score or (at or near the 30th percentile its equivalent) on EITHER the mathematics or reading portion of the nationally normed or state tests mandated for grades 1-4,

3. any student in SIA the previous school year with the recommendation of the teacher and supporting documentation with the following exceptions:

   (a) the student has been placed in the Remedial Education Program.

   (b) the student scored at or above the scale scored (at or near the 35th percentile or its equivalent) on the two most recent nationally - or state-required tests in grades first through fourth,

4. Program placement is decided after potentially-eligible students are identified. Criteria for selection for placement shall be included in the system application. These criteria shall include supporting documented evidence of one or more of the following:
   -parent questionaires or interviews
   -teacher's observations
   -results of additional standardized tests
   -language evaluation

D. Grades Kindergarten-Five

1. Any student enrolling in grades kindergarten through five may be eligible for services if he/she has been through the Student Support Team process and has documented evidence to support the placement. Documented evidence may include results of parent interviews, teacher's observations, results of standardized tests and/or language evaluations.

2. Any student retained in grade.

3. Any student in the SIA Program the previous school year.

4. Students who are enrolled in any of the special education programs serving mental or specific learning disabilities are not eligible for the SIA program.

E. Exit Procedure, Grades Kindergarten-Five

Any SIA student may be exited from the Program if he/she has been through the Student Support Team process and has documented evidience to support the placement in the regular program. Documented evidence may include results of parent interviews, teachers observations, results of standardized tests and/or language evaluations.

II. Delivery Models

SIA shall include a developmentally-appropriate instructional program, a parent component and a staff development component. Any or all of the of instructional models may be used within a school or a system.

Delivery Models continued

A. Reduced Class Size Model

The class size is reduced from the respective individual class size as specified in State Board Policy IEC by one student for every two eligible students served. Class size is reduced as noted in Appendix A. SIA students should be grouped within a heterogeneous class. For SIA, a heterogeneous class is defined as one in which SIA-eligible students are grouped with a majority of non-SIA eligible students. This grouping allows for the full participation of all students in class activities. If heterogeneous grouping or group size is impossible due to the characteristics of the student population, an explanation must be included in the program application or upon exceeding the specified group size.

B. Augmented Model

Ten or fewer SIA students are placed within heterogeneous classrooms. An additional teacher certified in early childhood works with the SIA students within these classes for a minimum of one hour per day. For SIA, a heterogeneous class is defined as one in which SIA-eligible students are grouped with a majority of non-SIA eligible students. This grouping allows for the full participation of all students in class activities. If heterogeneous grouping or group size is impossible due to the characteristics of the student population, an explanation must be included in the program application or upon exceeding the specified group size.

The SIA teacher works with the regular teacher in coordinating the instructional program and provides direct services to eligible students within the regular classroom.

For SIA, a heterogeneous class is defined as one in which SIA-eligible students are grouped with non-eligible students. This grouping allows for the full participation of all students in class activities.

If the above two models are inappropriate or impossible to implement, documentation of the system's need for the following model must be provided including the reasons.

C. System-Designed Model

If the system has a well-documented, educationally-sound model, a description and the documentation must be attached.

System-designed models must include the instructional, parent and staff development components which reflect developmentally-appropriate practices.

Systems may develop a model to meet their unique grouping needs; however, all other program requirements should be met during the school year.

Funds will be granted upon approval of this model by the Department of Education.

III. Instructional Component

SIA shall provide developmentally-appropriate learning experiences which enable children to reach age-appropriate expectations in the areas of language, cognitive, affective and motor development. Cognition is defined as conceptual development.

A. Instructional Strategies

Strategies used in the program shall be designed to facilitate further development of children's language, cognitive, affective and motor skills. They should be based on knowledge of how children learn, informal ongoing assessments, appropriate age expectations, and the importance of self-esteem. See Administrative Procedures for age characteristics and implications for instruction.

A developmentally appropriate instructional program is characterized by:

-a focus on literacy
-curriculum, which integrates all developmental areas and subjects by organizing teaching experiences around unit themes for at least part of the day
-learning centers, both structured and exploratory, that are available to each child for at least one hour a day,
-instructional materials that are concrete, real, and relevant to children's lives, in the areas of language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, art, music, physical education, health, dance and drama.
-an instructional day that is organized to promote meaningful conversation among children and between children and adults,
-responsibility for initiating learning experiences is often shared by the the child and teacher together, and
-activities that expand the learning environment beyond the school.

B. Instructional Materials

Instructional materials and equipment purchased with SIA funds shall support the developmental learning experiences that are defined for this program by the QCC and resource guides and should supplement or enhance materials and equipment normally obtained with funds allotted under State Board Policy IFA Instructional Media/Resources.

IV. Parent Component

Because parents exert a major influence on their children, each school system shall include the parents as instructional partners within the SIA program. An orientation meeting for parents or an individual parent conference must be held during the first six weeks of school to explain the SIA program.

A. Parent Instructional Program

Each school with SIA shall provide the parents of students in that program with at least six instructional opportunities during the school year. The orientation session may be one of these six opportunities. The program shall include opportunities for developing parental skills related to child growth and development in the language, cognitive, affective, and motor domains. The program may be provided by the SIA teacher, consultants, guidance personnel, visiting teacher or by other support, administrative or community personnel.

B. Parent-Teacher Conferences

Each school system shall provide opportunities for at least three formal parent-teacher conferences throughout the year.

C. Parent Involvement

Each school system shall provide opportunities for and encourage parents to participate in the instructional program as a volunteer.

V. Staff Development Component

Staff development should focus on the implementation of a developmentally-appropriate curriculum, appropriate instructional practices, and strategies for working with parents.

A. Schools with SIA programs shall provide an overview to the entire staff which addresses each component of the program.

B. All supervisors, administrative staff, teachers and paraprofessionals working with the SIA program shall attend an orientation which addresses each component of the program.

C. The following persons shall participate in staff development for the SIA program:
- -teachers
- -paraprofessionals/teacher aides
- -principals/assistant principals/lead teachers
- -other school support staff who work with SIA students
- -resource teachers who provide instruction for SIA students
- -other

Staff Development Continued

On-going staff development for SIA teachers, augmented classroom teachers, and paraprofessionals shall include the following instructional elements: the rationale and description of the developmental approach, instruction on how to organize and implement a developmental classroom, modeling or demonstration of teaching strategies, practice in using the developmental approach, feedback, and long-term coaching about their performance. Every effort should be made to include this required staff development in the system's comprehensive staff development plan.

VI. Program Evaluation

The evaluation of the SIA program will be both formative and summative. Data will be collected in order to evaluate the effectiveness of each of the components of this program and will include longitudinal studies. The collection and reporting of data by the local system will be forms designated by the Department of Education.

VII. Application for Funds

Funding will be provided on a grant basis. To apply, each system shall submit its application to the Georgia Department of Education for approval. Funding will be based on an approved plan and the amount granted will depend on the actual number of eligible students served. The initial allocation will be an amount equal to 60 percent of the total grant based on the estimated number of students to be served. Using a Fall count of students served by SIA, the actual amount of the grant shall be established. The difference between the initial allotment and the actual amount will determine the remaining allocation to the system. If the initial allotment exceeds the actual amount of the grant, the system must return the excess funds to the State.

In fiscal year 1991, funding for grades kindergarten and one will be based on the actual number of eligible students served in the preceding year. For grades two through five, the initial allocation will be an amount equal to 60 percent of the total grant based on the estimated number of students to be served. Using a Fall count of students served by SIA, the actual amount of the grant for those grades shall be established. The difference between the initial allotment and the actual amount will determine the remaining allocation to the system. If the initial allotment exceeds the actual amount of the grant, the system must return the excess funds to the State.

VIII. Planning Process

To apply for an SIA grant, each system shall submit an application for the implementation of such a program.

A. The application shall be developed with input from representative K-5 teachers, and administrators at each SIA school and school support personnel,

B. The application shall include, but is not limited to:

1. the number of eligible students to be served,

2. the choice of model(s) to be used and a rationale for each choice,

3. a description of the instructional strategies and materials to be used,

4. a description of the parent component activities

5. a description of the staff development component activities or a copy of the system's approved staff development plan with specific SIA activities highlighted

Appendix A

Grade Level: Kindergarten

The teacher and paraprofessional class size is based on the full-time equivalent count and SIA reductions are taken from the individual class size as specified in State Board policy IEC.

Class Size: 22 with paraprofessional

Additional funding: 1/2 of direct instructional cost.

SIA students	Non-SIA students	Maximum total in SIA class
1	20	21
2	19	21
3	17	20
4	16	20
5	14	19
6	13	19
7	11	18
8	10	18

Class Size: 17 without Paraprofessional

Additional funding: 1/2 of direct instructional cost

SIA Students	Non-SIA Students	Maximum total in class
1	15	16
2	13	15
3	12	15
4	10	14
5	9	14
6	7	13

SIA classes may not exceed the maximum size of 21 with a teacher and paraprofessional or 16 with a teacher only.

Grade Level: 1st-3rd

The teacher and paraprofessional class size is based on the full-time equivalent count and SIA reductions are taken from the individual class size as specified in State Board policy IEC.

Class Size: 26 with paraprofessional

Additional funding: 1/2 of direct instructional cost.

SIA Students	Non-SIA Students	Maximum total in class
1	24	25
2	23	25
3	21	24
4	20	24
5	18	23
6	17	23
7	15	22
8	14	22
9	12	21
10	11	21

Class Size: 20 without paraprofessional

Additional funding: 1/2 of direct instructional cost.

SIA Students	Non-SIA Students	Maximum total in class
1	18	19
2	16	18
3	15	18
4	13	17
5	12	17
6	10	16
7	9	16

SIA classes may not exceed a maximum size of 25 with a teacher and paraprofessional or 19 with a teacher only.